

Written Testimony

EXHIBIT 10
DATE 1-10-07
HB 2

To: Chair

Human Services

From Bonnie Girdwood *BH*

Date; January 8, 2007

Madam chair and members of the committee

I am Bonnie Girdwood from Sand Coulee house district 19. I'm a peer support specialist working at the center for Mental Health in Great Falls. I am an artist and poet, mother of 6 with a diagnosis of manic/depression and I have been in the system for 18 years. I know I didn't want to do this any more. The thought of being like this for the rest of my life was unbearable.

There were no dreams, no holidays to enjoy no family and just life in general was too much. Drs. Said it will never get better. I took a class in w.r.a.p. Wellness recovery action program and I felt better-safe. They gave me tools to use to balance me and tools if I lost my balance more and couldn't take care of my self, I could still be safe.

Then I took a peer to peer class. This is where I remember getting hope. Peers talking to peers using positive speech. Learning to advocate for each other finding out I'm not the only one like me and not to isolate myself.

I've gone to work for peer support using these tools. Follow up care of one contact that had been giving away all her things, assign of suicide, using experience and all I've learned- she set boundaries for her family to stop fighting , also she uses less pain medicine to be clear in mind.

Each time I see this miracle of peer support it reinforces what I've learned. My non Medicaid funded visits to my therapist will be enough even though its been cut to 4 visits a year. I know I can help those not so far in recovery.

In the first two weeks of work, over the holidays there were contacts. 8 all of them were from referrals by case managers, all asked for follow up care.

I am not a flavor of the month, nor am I experiencing a manic episode. This is real, please look and see it reflected in me. We the peer support can be the answer to the rising health care need and the rising costs. As meta in Maricopa county in Arizona proved in a 5 year period to be so cost efficient as to pay 75 .00 an hour to peer support workers

THANKYOU.